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Contributors

1. Adeniyi, Sakiru
   Dept. of Yoruba
   School of Languages
   Adeniran Ogunsanya College of
   Education
   Otto/Ijanikin, Lagos

2. Afolayan, Bosede Funke
   Dept. of English
   University of Lagos
   Lagos

3. Afisi, Oseni Taiwo
   Dept. of Philosophy,
   Lagos State University,
   Ojo, Lagos.

4. Animashaun, Maruf
   Dept. of Foreign Languages
   Lagos State University,
   Ojo, Lagos

5. Àkànmú, Dayọ̀
   School of Languages
   Adeniran Ogunsanya College of
   Education
   Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State, Nigeria

6. Amore, Kehinde Pedro
   Dept. of English
   Tai Solarin University of
   Education
   Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.

7. Amosu, Kehinde Olorunwa
   Dept. of Philosophy,
   Lagos State University
   Ojo, Nigeria.

8. Amusan, Kayode Victor
   Dept. of English,
   University of Ibadan
   Ibadan

9. Baruwa, Olaide Abibat
   Dept. of Public Relations and
   Advertising
   Lagos State University

10. Bello, Abayomi Omotoyosi
    Dept of Theatre Arts & Music
    Lagos State University
    Ojo

11. Komolafe, Hezekiah Deji
    Dept. of Religions,
    University of Ilorin, Ilorin

12. Macaulay-Adeyelure, Olawunmi
    Dept. of Philosophy,
    Lagos State University, Nigeria.

13. Makinde, Solomon Olarenwaju
    Dept. of Language, Arts & Social
    Science Education,
    Lagos State University
    Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria.

14. Musa, Haruna
    Dept. of Foreign Languages
    Lagos State University

15. Olawuyi, Ebenezer Adebisi
    Dept. of Communication &
    Language Arts
    University of Ibadan
    Nigeria

16. Oniyide, Daud
    Dept. of Foreign Languages
    Lagos State University,
    Ojo, Lagos

17. Saibu, Israel Abayomi
    Dept. of History & International
    Studies
    Anchor University
    Lagos, Nigeria

18. Thanny, Noeem Taiwo
    Dept. of Public Relations and
    Advertising
    Lagos State University

19. Thomas, Razaq
    Dept. of Foreign Languages
    Faculty of Arts
    Lagos State University, Ojo

20. Yekini-Ajenifuja, Isaac A.
    Dept. of Theatre Arts and Music
    Lagos State University, Ojo

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Phoneme /L/ and its Allophones in the Southeast Yorùbá: An Optimality Theory Account

Adeniyi, Sakiru

Abstract

There is no issue surrounding the phonemic status of consonants [l and n] in standard Yorùbá. It is proven that consonants [l and n] are allophones of the same phoneme, which establishes the fact that l~n alternation does exist in the SY. Phoneme /l/ has two allophones: [l] and [n]; consonant [l] occurs before an oral vowel and consonant [n] occurs before a nasal vowel. Two schools of thought on the phonemic status of consonants [l and n] exist in Southeast Yorùbá dialects; a school accepts that consonants [l and n] are better treated as distinct phonemes; the other school believes, on the other hand, that consonants [l and n] cannot be treated as distinct phonemes, but rather allophones of the same phoneme. This study is the account of phoneme /l/ and its allophones in the Southeast Yorùbá. The writer gathered primary and secondary data. The secondary source includes published and unpublished materials used by the writer. The primary source the writer adopts is interview; interviewing the native speakers of the selected dialects, then, tape and note recording the information given by each informant in order to listen to it all over again for accuracy purposes. This study accounts for phoneme /l/ and its allophones in Southeast Yorùbá using optimality theory (OT). This paper investigates whether l~n alternation does exist in Southeast Yorùbá. It reveals that consonants [l and n] cannot be treated as distinct phonemes but allophones of the same phoneme. In fact, there are more to phoneme /l/ and its variants than what we know in Standard Yorùbá (SY). Three SEY dialects were selected for this study. They are Ẹ̀gbá, Ìjẹ̀bú, and Ìkálẹ̀ dialects.

Keywords: phoneme, allophones, Southeast Yorùbá, optimality theory

Introduction

Awobuluyi (1992: 46) claims there is no l~n alternation in Southeast Yorùbá dialects. He established this by claiming the consonant [n] nasalises every oral segment occurring immediately to its right in Ìkálẹ̀ dialect while the consonant [l] denasalises any nasal vowel occurring immediately to its right in Ẹ̀gba dialect. His claim projected that there is no l~n alternation in these two SEY dialects (Ìkálẹ̀ and Ẹ̀gba respectively). This is what he meant when he says

> The l~n alternation rule, which can be regarded as one of the distinguishing features of contemporary Standard Yorùbá, does not apply in this dialect (Ìkálẹ̀). Similarly for the Ẹ̀gba dialect.

Olumuyiwa (1994: 15-16), supported the school of thought that sees [n] and [l] as allophones of the same phoneme, by claiming that there is l~n alternation across Yorùbá dialects.

> Evidence from Ìkálẹ̀, Ìlàjẹ, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìdànrè, Òmuò, Ìlaṣà, Gbẹdẹ, and Owé dialects proves that [l] and [n] does not occur in a complementary distribution of "ní.".but they may occur in a complementary distribution of "oní."

What Olumuyiwa is saying here is phoneme /l/ is realised as [n] in verb phrase and prepositional phrase, as [l] in prefix "oní" context. As in the following examples:

	SY	Òǹdó & Ayétòrò-Gbẹ̀dẹ̀
1.	ní ẹja—léja	ní ẹja—néja; "to have some fish"
	SY	Ayétòrò-Gbẹ̀dẹ̀
2.	Oní ẹja—ẹléja	oní ẹja—ẹléja
	SY	Òǹdó
	Oní ẹja—ẹléja	lí ẹja—léja.

He claimed that [l] and [n] are in complementary distribution in all contexts in dialects like Ọ̀yọ́, Ìbàdàn, Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́, Isàn etc.

> Consonants l and n are in complementary distribution in dialects like Ọ̀yọ́, Ìbàdàn, Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́, Isàn, Ìwó, Òṣogbo, Ìyemọrọ, Ilé-Ifẹ̀. In these dialects, consonant "l" occurs before an oral vowel, while consonant "n" occurs before a nasal vowel.

The distribution of phoneme /l/ and its allophones in the selected South-East Yorùbá dialects are discussed in four contexts as shown below:

1. *Ní* context   "verb to have/preposition (at/in)"
2. Prefix *oní* context
3. Verbal context
4. Verb "to be" and focused construction (FOC)

The Distribution of /l/ and its Allophones in Ẹ̀gbá Dialect

The data below was recorded from the native speakers of the selected SEY dialects the writer used as informants for this work.

Ní and prefix *oní* contexts

The consonant [l] always occurs in "ní" and "oní" contexts as in the following examples.

	SY	Egba	
1. a.	/nî ilé/ in/at house	/lí ilé/= [lílé]	"at home"
b.	/nî owó/ have money	/lí owó/= [lówó]	"to be rich or to have money"
c.	/onî gàrí/ prefix cassava flakes	/olí gàrí/= [olígàrí]	"a cassava flakes seller"
d.	/onî ìkpara/ prefix cream	/olí ìkpara/= [olíkpara]	"a (body) cream seller"

/l/ in Verbal context

Aside *ní* and *oní* contexts," consonant /l/ has two allophones which are [l] and [n] in verbal context. Consonant [l] occurs when it precedes an oral vowel and consonant [n] occurs when it precedes a nasal vowel as in the following examples.

	SY	Egba	
2. a.	/lá/	[lá]	"to lick"
b.	/lù/	[lù]	"to beat"
c.	/nã́/	[nṍ]	"to spend"
d.	/nṹ/	[nṹ]	"to clean/wipe"

Distribution of /l/ and Its Allophones in Ìjẹ̀bú and Ìkálẹ̀ Dialects

Allophones of /l/ are [l] and [n] in Ìjẹ̀bú and Ìkálẹ̀ dialects as it is in Ẹ̀gbá dialect.

Ní context

Unlike Ẹ̀gbá dialect, consonant [n] occurs in all the aforementioned contexts in Ìjẹ̀bú and Ìkálẹ̀ dialects as in the following examples:

		SY	Ìjèbú and Ìkálè dialects	
3. a.		/nɪ́ ilé/ in/at house	/nɪ́ ulé/= [nɪ́lé]	"at home"
	b.	/nɪ́ agbára/ have power	/nɛ́ agbára/= [nǎgbára]	"to be strong/serious"
	c.	/nɪ́ ahŭ/ have stinginess	/nɛ̌ ahŭ/= [nǎhŭ]	"to be stingy"

Prefix *oní* context

The consonant [l] occurs when the root word is a vowel initial word (vowel [u] inclusive but [i] exclusive), and consonant [n] occurs when the root word starts with vowel [i] and a consonant sound as in the following examples.

		SY	Ìjèbú and Ìkálè dialects	
4. a.		/onɪ́ iSu/ prefix yam	/onɪ́ uSu/= [olúSu]	"a yam seller"
	b.	/onɪ́ ata/ prefix pepper	/onɪ́ ata/= [aláta]	"a pepper seller"
	c.	/onɪ́ gàrí / prefix cassava flakes	/onɪ́ gàrí/= [onɪ́gàrí]	"a cassava flakes seller"

/l/ in verbal context

The case here is the same as we have in Ẹ̀gbá dialect as it is shown below.

		SY	Ìjèbú and Ìkálè dialects	
5. a.	/lá/	[lá]	"to lick"	
	b.	/lù/	[lù]	'to beat'
	c.	/nǎ/	[nɔ́] & [nǎ]	"to spend"

Like Ẹ̀gbá dialect, consonant /l/ is realised as [r] in Ìjèbú dialect in the verb "to be" (transitive) *ni* and FOC marker *ni* contexts, but /l/ is realised as [w] in Ẹ̀gbá dialect in the verb "to be" (intransitive) *ni,* while /l/ is realised as [w] or [n] in Ìjèbú dialect in the verb "to be" (transitive) *ni* as in the following examples:

	SY	Ìjèbú and Ìkálè dialects	
6. a.	/adé nî ɔba/ Nom is king	[adé re ɔba/ [adé rɔba] (verb to be; transitive)	"Ade is the king"
b.	/adé nî ó ra dòdò/	[adé rèé ra dòdò] (FOC)	"Ade was the one who bought the plantain"
c.	/adé nî/	(verb [adé e wà] to be; intransitive)	"It is/was Ade" (Ègbá dialect)
d.	/adé nî/	[adé re òun wà/ adé nî] (verb to be; intransitive)	"It is/was Ade" (Ìjèbú)

The word "Ẹnu" is realized in Ègbá, Ìkálè and Ìjèbú dialects as in the following:

7.	/ɛnŭ/	[ɛrŭ]	"mouth"

An Optimality Account of /l/ and Its Allophones in Ègbá, Ìjèbú, and Ìkálè Dialects

We intend to account for phoneme /l/ and its allophones in the South-East Yorùbá dialects using optimality theory (OT) because OT is the most potent theory in solving or resolving phonological issues which the earlier theories could not adequately address.

OT was unveiled for the first time by Alan Prince and Paul Smolesky in 1991 at University of Arizona Phonology Conference and the main reason for propounding this theory is as a result of the shortcomings of Generative Phonology. Kager (1998: 55-57) discussed the following shortcomings:

   a. Generative theory makes use of too many rules.
   b. There are many intermediate levels.
   c. The rules may or may not be ordered and at times some of these rules are cyclic.

Principles of Optimality Theory

Prince and Smolesky (1993), Kager (1999), Archangeli (1997) amongst others established following principles of the optimality theory.

   a. Universality
   b. Constraints
   c. Candidates
   d. Generator
   e. Ranking

f.   Evaluation

OT provides constraints, ranks these constraints, generates the candidates, and evaluates these candidates in order to know what is and what is not permissible in one language and the other: in turn, the optimal candidate emerges as the winner; the optimal candidate is the candidate that doesn't violate any highly ranked constraints.

The constraints ranking for the distribution of phoneme /l/ and its allophones will be in four groups as the /l/ has three allophones, which are: [l], [n], and [r] across the selected Yorùbá dialects.

The following constraints will be used to account for /l/ and its allophones show up.

1.	*SON ALV NAS:	Prohibit sonorant alveolar nasal
2.	FAITH SON ALV NAS:	Sonorant alveolar nasal in the input must have a correspondent in the output
3.	SON ALV NAS:	Allow sonorant alveolar nasal
4.	R-SON ALV:	Allow R-feature sonorant alveolar
5.	*R-SON ALV:	Prohibit R-feature sonorant alveolar
6.	*L-SON ALV:	Prohibit L-feature sonorant alveolar
7.	L-SON ALV:	Allow L-feature sonorant alveolar
8.	*W-SON PAL:	Prohibit W-feature sonorant palato
9.	W-SON PAL:	Allow W-feature sonorant palato

Phoneme /l/ in prepositional and verb phrase "ni" and prefix "oni" in all the selected dialects. The phoneme /l/ has two allophones: [l] as in Ẹ̀gbá ; [n] as in Ìjẹ̀bú, and Ìkálẹ̀.

Tableaux 1 to 2 illustrate this.

Tab. 1:   Ẹ̀gbá **dialect**

/ní ìta/ "outside"	*SON ALV NAS	SON ALV NAS
a. [lí ìta]		*
b.[ní ìta]	*!	

In tableau 1, *SON ALV NAS constraint is ranked high in Ẹ̀gbá dialect in this example. Any candidate that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not violate it. Candidate (a) violates FAITH SON ALV NAS (a lowly ranked constraint); candidate (b) violates *SON ALV NAS (a highly ranked constraint). Though, both

candidates in tableau 1 violated a constraint each, its candidate (a) that emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates a low ranked constraint.

Tableau 2: Ìjèbú and Ìkálè dialects

/ní ìta/ "outside"	FAITH SON ALV NAS	*SON ALV NAS
a.[ní ìta]		*
b.[lí ìta]	*!	

In tableau 2, FAITH SON ALV NAS constraint is highly ranked in these two dialects such that any candidate that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not violate it. Candidate (a) violates *SON ALV NAS a lowly ranked constraint, and candidate (b) violates FAITH SON ALV NAS a highly ranked constraint. Though, both candidates in tableau 2 violated a constraint each, candidate 2a emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates a lowly ranked constraint.

Consonant /l/ in verbal context has two allophones: [l] and [n] as in the selected SEY dialects. Tableaux 3 to 4 illustrates this.

Tableau 3:   Ègbá, Ìjèbú and Ìkálè dialects

/lá/ "to lick"	*SON ALV NAS	SON ALV NAS
a. [lá]		*
b.[nǎ]	*!	

In tableau 3, *SON ALV NAS constraint is ranked high in Ègbá dialect in this example. Any candidate that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not violate it. Candidate (a) violates SON ALV NAS (a lowly ranked constraint); candidate (b) violates *SON ALV NAS (a highly ranked constraint). Though, both candidates in tableau 3 violated a constraint each, its candidate (a) that emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates a low ranked constraint.

Tableau 4:   Ègbá, Ìjèbú and Ìkálè dialects

/nǎ/ "to spend (money)"	FAITH SON ALV NAS	*SON ALV NAS
a.[nɔ́]/[nǎ]		*
b. [lɔ]/ [lá]	*!	

In tableau 4, FAITH SON ALV NAS constraint is highly ranked in these two dialects such that any candidate that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not

violate it. Candidate (a) violates *SON ALV NAS a lowly ranked constraint, and candidate (b) violates FAITH SON ALV NAS a highly ranked constraint. Though, both candidates in tableau 4 violated a constraint each, candidate 4a emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates a lowly ranked constraint.

Phoneme /l/ in FOC marker and "ni" verb to be (transitive) in all the three dialects. /l/ has two allophones. These are: [r] as Ègbá and Ìjèbú, [n] as Ìkálè. Tableaux 5 and 6 illustrate this.

Tableau 5:   **Ègbá and Ìjèbú dialects**

/dodo	nĩ	adé	rà/	"It was fried plantain that Ade bought"
plantain	FOC	NOM	buy	

/nĩ/	R-SON ALV	*L-SON ALV	*SON ALV NAS	*R-SON ALV
a.[re]				*
b.[nĩ]	*!		*	
c.[li]	*!	*!		

In tableau 5, R-SON ALV and *L-SON ALV are highly ranked that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not violate any of these two highly ranked constraints. Candidate (a) only violates *R-SON ALV a low ranked constraint: candidate (b) violates R-SON ALV a highly ranked constraint and *SON ALV NAS a lowly ranked constraint: candidate (c) violates R-SON ALV and *L-SON ALV highly ranked constraints. With no doubt, candidate (5a) emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates a constraint which is lowly ranked.

Tableau 6:   **Ìkálè dialect**

/nĩ /	FAITH SON ALV NAS	*R-SON ALV	*SON ALV NAS	R-SON ALV
a.[re]	*!	*!		
b.[nĩ]			*	*
c.[li]	*!			*

In tableau 6, FAITH SON ALV NAS and *R-SON ALV constraints are highly ranked in this dialects. In this example, any candidate that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not violate any of these two highly ranked constraints. Candidate (a) violates FAITH SON ALV NAS and *R-SON ALV highly ranked constraints: candidate (b) violates *SON ALV NAS and R-SON ALV (lowly ranked constraints): candidate (c) violates FAITH SON ALV NAS (a highly ranked constraint) and R-SON

ALV (a lowly ranked constraint). In spite all the candidates in tableau (6) violated two constraints each, it is candidate (6b) that emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates lowly ranked constraints.

Phoneme /l/ in "ni" verb to be (intransitive) in all the three dialects. /l/ has two allophones, these are: [w] as Ẹ̀gbá and Ìjẹ̀bú, [n] as Ìkálẹ̀. Tableaux 7 and 8 illustrate this.

Tableau 7: Ẹ̀gbá and Ìjẹ̀bú Dialects

/adé	nĩ /	'It is/was Ade'
Name	verb to be	

/nĩ/	W-SON PAL	*L-SON ALV	*SON ALV NAS	*W-SON PAL
a.[wà]				*
b.[nĩ]	*!		*	
c.[li]	*!	*!		

In tableau 7, W-SON PAL and *L-SON ALV constraints are highly ranked in Ẹ̀gbá and Ìjẹ̀bú dialects. In this example, any candidate that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not violate any of these two highly ranked constraints. Candidate (a) violates *W-SON PAL (a highly ranked constraint): candidate (b) violates W-SON PAL (a high ranked constraint) and *SON ALV NAS (a low ranked constraint): candidate (c) also violates W-SON PAL and *L-SON ALV (high ranked constraints). Without any doubt, candidate (a) in tableau 7 emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates a constraint which is lowly ranked.

Tableau 8:   Ìkálẹ̀ dialect

/nĩ/	FAITH SON ALV NAS	*R-SON ALV	*SON ALV NAS	R-SON ALV
a.[wà]	*!			*
b.[nĩ]			*	*
c.[li]	*!			*

In tableau 8, FAITH SON ALV NAS and *R-SON ALV constraints are highly ranked in this dialect. In this example, any candidate that will emerge as an optimal candidate must not violate any of these two highly ranked constraints. Candidate (a) violates FAITH SON ALV NAS (a highly ranked constraint) and R-SON ALV (a low ranked constraint): candidate (b) violates *SON ALV NAS and R-SON ALV (low ranked constraints): candidate (c) violates FAITH SON ALV NAS (a highly ranked constraint) and R-SON ALV (a low ranked constraint).. Without any doubt,

candidate (b) in tableau 8 emerges as the optimal candidate as it only violates a lowly ranked constraint.

The constraints adopted above must be ranked in the following ways.

This is the ranking for allophone [l]

    i.   *SON ALV NAS >> SON ALV NAS

This is the ranking for allophone [n]

    i.   FAITH SON ALV NAS >> *SON ALV NAS.

    ii.   FAITH SON ALV NAS>> *R-SON ALV>> *SON ALV NAS>> R-SON ALV (FOC marker and verb to be contexts in Ìkálẹ̀)

This is the ranking for allophone [w]

    W-SON PAL>> * L-SON ALV >> *SON ALV NAS >> *W-SON PAL

    This is the ranking for allophone [r]

    R-SON ALV>> * L-SON ALV >> *SON ALV NAS >> *R-SON ALV

Conclusion

From the data presentation and the discussion above, it is clear that consonant /l/ has three allophones ([l], [n] and [r]) in Ìkálẹ̀ and four ([l], [n], [r], and [w]) in Ègbá and Ìjẹ̀bú dialects. The [l] in Ègbá has a wider distribution than any other allophones. The [n] in Ìjẹ̀bú and Ìkálẹ̀ dialects has a wider distribution than any other allophone. The variants of phoneme /l/ ranges from three to four across the selected SEY dialects. What appears to be of interest about the allophones of /l/ is the fact that all are sonorants.

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